

Message Text

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT,SF
SUBJ: BLACK ATTITUDES: THE PERSPECTIVE OF ABANNED
BLACK LEADER-ROBER SOBUKWE

REF: PRETORIA 5912

1. SUMMARY: SOBUKWE SEES BLACK ASCENDANCY IN SOUTH
AFRICA AS INEVITABLE ALTHOUGH DELAYED BY AFRIKANER
POLICIES. HE DOUBTS THAT TRANSITION WILL BE PEACEFUL
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BECAUSE THE AFRIKANERS DO NOT WANT TO SHARE POWER.
STUDENT PROTEST MOVEMENT LED BY INEXPERIENCED LEADERS
HAS MADE SERIOUS TACTICAL MISTAKES AND ALLOWED THINGS TO
GET OUT OF CONTROL IN THE TOWNSHIPS. CURRENT EFFORTS
TO UNIFY BLACK PROTEST GROUPS ARE USEFUL BUT PROBABLY
WILL NOT SUCCEED. ANC AND PAC ARE ACTIVE IN SOUTH
AFRICA BUT SOBUKWE PROFESSED LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OF THEIR

STRENGTH, STRATEGY AND TACTICS. WHITE LIBERAL EFFORTS TO PROMOTE TRANSITIONAL SCHEMES ARE NOT PROMISING. IF PEACEFUL CHANGES CAN BE ACHIEVED, IT MUST COME FROM CHANGED ATTITUDES WITHIN AFRIKANERDOM AND THIS UNLIKELY. SAG COULD TEMPORARILY TAKE STEAM OUT OF BLACK UNREST BY MAKING CERTAIN CHANGES BUT IT GIVES NO SIGNS OF BEING WILLING TO DO THIS. UNITED STATES IMAGE HAS SUFFERED IN AFRICA IN RECENT YEARS. IN SOUTH AFRICA THERE IS IMPRESSION THAT USG GIVES COMFORT TO SAG. US SHOULD REFURBISH ITS IMAGE THROUGHOUT AFRICA. IN SOUTH AFRICA IT SHOULD MAKE CLEAR ITS OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID, REVIEW ITS POLICY TOWARD PRIVATE INVESTMENT AND EXPAND ITS EXCHANGE PROGRAMS.

2. ON JANUARY 8 I TRAVELED TO KIMBERLEY TO HAVE A GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH BANNED PAN AFRICAN CONGRESS LEADER ROBERT SOBUKWE. THE MEETING TOOK PLACE IN THE HOME OF HIS AIDE ACHMED LAHER AND LASTED FOR THREE HOURS. NO ONE ELSE WAS PRESENT SINCE UNDER THE TERMS OF HIS BANNING ORDER SOBUKWE MAY MEET WITH ONLY ONE PERSON AT A TIME. THE CONVERSATION RANGED OVER A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS TO WHICH WE RETURNED TO VARIOUS STAGES. FOR PURPOSES OF COHESION AND CLARITY, THIS REPORT FOLLOWS A TOPICAL ARRANGEMENT OF THE DISCUSSION.

3. PRESENT STATE OF THE BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS MOVEMENT: SOBUKWE IS A REFLECTIVE, PHILOSOPHICAL MAN WHO LOOKS AT EVENTS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT RATHER THAN AS EPISODIC PHENOMENA. HE SEES THE TIDE OF BLACK NATIONALISM AS

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FINALLY HAVING REACHED THE FRONTIERS OF SOUTH AFRICA, DELAYED BY A SERIES OF HISTORICAL FACTORS BUT INEVITABLE AND IRRESISTIBLE IN ITS SWEEP. HE BELIEVES THAT THE BLACK MAN WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH FURTHER ALONG IN POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT HAD THE AFRIKANER NOT GAINED CONTROL IN 1948. THE NATIONALISTS HAVE TRIED TO REVERSE THE TREND OF HISTORY OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS AND HAVE FAILED. AT A TIME WHEN AFRICAN WAS MOVING TOWARD MODERNIZATION AND AWAY FROM TRIBALISM, THE AFRIKANER WAS TRYING TO FORCE BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA TO DEVELOP ALONG TRIBAL LINES. THE SOWETO RIOTS AND THEIR AFTERMATH HAVE MADE A SHAMBLES OF THE SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT POLICY. THE YOUTH WHO WERE BORN AND HAVE GROWN UP IN THE APARTHEID MOLD ARE THE ONES WHO ARE REBELLING AGAINST IT. WHY? THERE ARE MANY FACTORS, BUT PRINCIPAL AMONG THEM IS THAT THE PROCESS OF INDEPENDENCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA, FOR ALL THE MANY ERRORS AND ABUSES IN ITS APPLICATIONS, HAS SHOWN THEM THAT THE BLACK MAN IS NOT INHERENTLY INFERIOR BUT THAT IN SOUTH AFRICA HE HAS BEEN PREVENTED FROM ACQUIRING

THE SKILLS AND PLAYING THE ROLE THAT RIGHTFULLY BELONG TO HIM. HENCE, WHAT TAKES PLACE IN THE REST OF AFRICA-- WHAT GHANA ACHIEVED IN 1960S UNDER NKRUMAH AND WHAT NIGERIA IS DOING TODAY--IS HIGHLY RELEVANT TO THE MOTIVATION OF THE BLACK MAN IN SOUTH AFRICA AS HE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE. FURTHERMORE, FOR BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA TO HAVE TIES WITH OTHER BLACK AFRICAN STATES--AND THESE ARE GROWING--AND TO KNOW THAT THEY CAN COUNT ON THEIR SYMPATHY AND SUPPORT-- AS IS NOW HAPPENING IN THE UNITED NATIONS--IS VERY IMPORTANT TO BLACK NATIONALISM IN THIS COUNTRY. HE NEVER QUITE GOT AROUND TO SAYING THAT AFRICA IS MORE IMPORTANT TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS IN THEIR LIBERATION STRUGGLE THAN THE UNITED STATES, BUT THE IMPLICATION WAS THERE.

4. THE STUDENTS WHO REBELLED AGAINST THE SYSTEM IN JUNE HAVE LOST CONTROL OF THE MOVEMENT. PROTEST MOVEMENTS OF THIS INTENSITY UNLEASH CERTAIN LATENT VIOLENT ELEMENT

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IN A SOCIETY. THESE ELEMENT CAN PLAY A USEFUL ROLL IF KEPT UNDER CONTROL. POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS LAKE ANC AND PAC HAVE THE POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION TO DO THIS; THE STUDENTS DID NOT. TWO BASIC MISTAKES HAVE BEEN COMMITTED. ONE IS THAT THE VIOLENCE IN THE TOWNSHIPS HAS BEEN ALLOWED TO GET OUT OF HAND AND MANY INNOCENT PEOPLE HAVE SUFFERED. THE GOVERNMENT HAS RESPONDED TO TERRORISM WITH COUNTER-TERRORISM. THE BULK OF THE ADULT POPULATION, ON WHOSE SUPPORT THE STUDENTS MUST COUNT IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL, HAVE BEEN CAUGHT BETWEEN THE TWO TERRORISMS. THEY SHARE THE STUDENTS' ASPIRATIONS, BUT ARE TURNED OFF BY THE INDISCRIMINATE VIOLENCE. TERRORISM AS A TACTIC IS USEFUL BUT IT MUST BE USED SELECTIVELY AND IN COMBINATION WITH PERSUASION. IF WELL-KNOWN COLLABORATORS HAD BEEN THE TARGET AND THE ACTION TAKEN CONFINED TO THEM, THE MESSAGE WOULD HAVE BEEN MORE EFFECTIVE.

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5. THE OTHER MISTAKE RELATES TO THE WORK BOYCOTTS. THEY
WERE CALLED WITHOUT ADEQUATE PREPARATION, WITH TOO GREAT
FREQUENCY AND IN THE CASE OF THE LAST ONE IN SOWETO FOR
TOO LONG A PERIOD AND UNDER THE WRONG CIRCUMSTANCES. THE
HISTORY OF STAY-AT-HOME EFFORTS IN SOUTH AFRICA SHOW THE
VULNERABILITY OF THE BLACK ADULT TO THIS KIND OF ACTION.
HE LACKS THE SAVINGS NECESSARY TO SUSTAIN HIMSELF AND
HIS FAMILY. UNDER LEGISLATION GOVERNING HIS PRESENCE
IN WHITE AREAS, THE GOVERNMENT CAN EASILY DEPRIVE HIM
OF HIS HOUSE OR SEND HIM BACK TO HIS HOMELAND. AT A
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TIME OF ACUTE RECESSION WHEN THOUSANDS ARE UNEMPLOYED AND
LOOKING FOR WORK, THERE IS A HIGHER RISK OF HIS EMPLOYER
REPLACING HIM IF HE DOES NOT SHOW UP FOR WORK. IN THE
PAST, THE ANC KEPT WORK BOYCOTTS DOWN TO 1-3 DAYS.
SUFFICIENT TIME WAS ALLOWED FOR FAMILIES TO STOCK ADEQUATE
SUPPLIES OF FOOD TO TIDE THEM OVER. AND THE BOYCOTT WAS CAST
IN SUCH A WAY THAT IT DID NOT APPEAR TO BE A CONFRONTATION
BETWEEN WORKER AND EMPLOYER (WHICH HEIGHTENS THE DANGER OF
HIS BEING FIRED) BUT BETWEEN WORKER AND GOVERNMENT. TO
ACCOMPLISH THIS, CIRCUMSTANCES MUST BE CREATED WHICH CAN
BE BLAMED ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PREVENT HIM FROM GOING TO
WORK OR MAKE IT TOO DANGEROUS TO DO SO. IF THE BLACK WORKER
COULD BELONG TO TRADE UNIONS WHICH WOULD DEFEND HIS RIGHTS

WITH EMPLOYERS AND PROVIDE COMPENSATION, HE WOULD BE MAKING COMMON CAUSE WITH THE STUDENTS INSTEAD OF APPEARING TO REMAIN ALOOF. OF COURSE, THIS IS ONE OF THE MAIN REASONS WHY THE SAG DOES NOT WANT BLACK WORKERS TO ORGANIZE. YOUTH AND WORKERS ARE NOT AT LOGGER HEADS, BUT THE YOUNG ACTIVISTS MUST HAVE A BETTER APPRECIATION OF THE PROBLEMS THE WORKER FACES AND THE RESOURCEFULNESS OF THE GOVERNMENT IN PLAYING ON THOSE WEAKNESSES.

6. ANC-PAC-BUF: SOBUKWE CLAIMED THAT THE ANC AND PAC WERE VERY ACTIVE BUT HELD THAT HE KNEW VERY LITTLE ABOUT THEIR CURRENT STRENGTH, STRATEGY AND TACTICS. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE PAC HAD VERY RECENTLY PROPOSED TO THE ANC THAT THEY COMBINE THEIR EFFORTS BUT HAD BEEN TURNED DOWN. THE ANC IS TOO WELL HEELED, HE OBSERVED. SOBUKWE EMPHASIZED THE MOSCOW ORIENTATION AND DOMINATION OF THE ANC. UNDERSTANDABLY, HE SPOKE MORE FAVORABLY OF THE PAC (WHICH HE ESTABLISHED IN 1959-60) UNDERSCORING ITS NATIONALISM WITHOUT ATTEMPTING TO HIDE THE PEKING SUPPORT. HE SAID IN THE LONG RUN THE CHINESE WILL DO BETTER THAN THE RUSSIANS IN AFRICA BECAUSE THEY UNDERSTAND AFRICAN NATIONALISM MUCH BETTER AND RESPECT IT.

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7. SOBUKWE ACKNOWLEDGED THE NEED FOR BLACK UNITY BUT THOUGHT THAT AT THIS STAGE OF THE REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE, IT WAS PERHAPS TOO MUCH TO EXPECT. IN SOME BLACK AFRICAN STATES CURCUMSTANCES MADE A SINGLE ORGANIZATION POSSIBLE; IN OTHERS IT DID NOT. BLACK ASCENDANCY HAS NEVERTHELESS PROCEEDED. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THE HISTORY OF THE AFRIKANER IN SOUTH AFRICA GAVE THE LIBERATION STRUGGLE A DIFFERENT DIMENSION BUT IN THE END IT WOULD NOT ALTER THE OUTCOME. FORMATION OF THE ANC IN 1912, RELATED SOBUKWE, WAS AN EFFORT TO GO BEYOND TRIBALISM TO BLACK NATIONALISM. THE PAC SPLIT IN 1959-60 CAME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF IDEOLOGICAL AND TACTICAL DIFFERENCES AND NOT TRIBAL RIVALRIES. HE ORGANIZED THE YOUTH LEAGUES WITHIN THE ANC IN ORDER TO CONTROL THE INROADS OF MARXISM AND WHEN HIS EFFORT WAS NOT SUCCESSFUL, HE BROKE AWAY AND FORMED THE PAC. (INCIDENTALLY, SOBUKWE SAID THAT HE AND GATSHA BUTELEZI WERE BOTH ACTIVE IN THE ANC IN THEIR COLLEGE DAYS AT FORT HARE IN THE LATE 1940S. SOBUKWE WAS ANC SECRETARY AND BUTELEZI JUST A MEMBER. SOBUKWE WAS ONE YEAR AHEAD OF BUTELEZI BUT THEY KNEW EACH OTHER WELL AND WORKED TOGETHER.) BUTELEZI'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A BLACK UNITY FRONT IS A GOOD IDEA ACCORDING TO SOBUKE, BUT HE WAS OBVIOUSLY SKEPTICAL THAT IT WOULD WORK AND THAT THE ZULU LEADER IS THE MAN TO DO IT. AS THE MAIN REASON FOR HIS SKEPTICISM, SOBUKWE REFERRED TO

BUTHELEZI'S TENDENCY TO DOMINATE EVERYTHING HE IS INVOLVED IN. HE ALSO MENTIONED BUTHELEZI'S UNPOPULARITY AMONG BLACK YOUTH AS ANOTHER IMPORTANT CONSIDERATION. NEVERTHELESS, HE WISHED HIS FRIEND WELL SINCE ANYTHING THAT HEIGHTENS BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND PROMOTES COORDINATION OF EFFORT WOULD BE HELPFUL. IT WAS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT SOBUKWE SAW THE BLACK MOVEMENT TAKING ON SOME OTHER CONFIGURATION IN THE FUTURE.

8. WHILE SOBUKWE DECLINED TO GO INTO THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE ANC AND PAC IN SOUTH AFRICA, HE NOTED THAT THE ANC

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STRENGTH HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN IN NATAL, EASTERN TRANSVAAL, THE OLDER TOWNSHIPS OF JOHANNESBURG AND PORT ELIZABETH, WHILE THE PAC IN COMBINATION WITH THE BLACK PEOPLES CONVENTION HAS MOST OF ITS SUPPORTERS IN THE WESTERN CAPE, THE VAAL TRIANGLE, THE NEW TOWNSHIP OF JOHANNESBURG AND EAST LONDON. THE INDIAN HAS TRADITIONALLY LEANED TOWARD THE ANC BECAUSE OF THE LONG HISTORY OF ANC COOPERATION WITH THE INDIAN CONGRESS. THE CAPE COLOREDS SYMPATHIZE WITH THE PAC BECAUSE THE PAC ESPoused THEIR CAUSE WHEN THE COLOREDS WERE DISENFRANCHISED. HE DESCRIBED THE ANC AS PRAGMATIC AND FLEXIBLE, WILLING TO MAKE ANY COMBINATION THAT FURTHERS ITS PURPOSES. THE PAC-BPC, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS NOT WILLING TO COLLABORATE WITH THOSE OPPOSED TO ITS PRINCIPLES.

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9. ATTITUDE TOWARD WHITE LIBERALS AND TRANSITIONAL SCHEMES:
SOBUKWE SAID THAT THE WHITE LIBERAL IS CAUGHT BETWEEN THE
TWO EXTREMES OF WHITE CONSERVATISM AND BLACK EXTREMISM.
TO THE FORMER HE IS A TRAITOR TO THE CAUSE. FOR THE LATTER
HE IS THE CLOSEST TARGET TO ATTACK. THE DANGER IS THAT
THE WHITE LIBERAL IN HIS DESIRE TO BE ACCEPTED BY BLACKS
REFRAINS FROM CRITICIZING BLACKS FOR THEIR FAILINGS. IN
THE PROCESS, HE LOSES CREDIBILITY. MANY WHITE LIBERAL
PLANS FOR MOVING TO TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR BLACK
PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNMENT HAVE MUCH TO COMMEND THEM.

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BUT NONE ARE LIKELY TO PROSPER. IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN
CONTEXT WHERE THE AFRIKANER IS DOMINANT, TRANSITIONAL CHANGE
WILL HAVE TO COME ABOUT BY A CHANGE WITHIN AFRIKANERDOM
ITSELF. THE TENDENCY, OF COURSE, IS FOR THE NATIONALISTS
TO RESIST ANY REFORM WHICH DETRACTS FROM THEIR PARAMOUNT POSITION.
YET THEY ARE CAPABLE OF CHANGE IF CIRCUMSTANCES MAKE IT
NECESSARY. A FEW OF THE MORE ENLIGHTENED INTELLECTUALS ARE
BEGINNING TO EXPRESS THE NEED FOR RETHINKING ATTITUDES TOWARD
BLACKS IN A FUNDAMENTAL WAY. SO FAR THE CHANGES ADVANCED BY
THE GOVERNMENT ARE NOT MEANINGFUL. BUT IF THE SAG WERE TO
ABOLISH BANTU EDUCATION, REMOVE JOB RESERVATION AND GIVE
BLACK LABOR MOBILITY AND ALLOW BLACK URBAN COUNCILS TO FUNCTION
IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE WHITE MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS WHERE
THEY ARE LOCATED, SUCH MEASURES WOULD GO A LONG WAY TO DAMPEN
THE PRESENT UNREST. ADULT BLACKS WOULD BE AND LARGE ACCEPT
THESE CHANGES AND THE YOUNG PEOPLE WOULD BE SPLIT. BUT IT WAS
CLEAR THAT SOBUKWE DID NOT EXPECT THE AFRIKANER TO SHOW
THE NECESSARY FLEXIBILITY. AT THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION
HE OBSERVED "THE AFRIKANERS WILL PROBABLY LOSE ALL BECAUSE
THEY DON'T WANT TO SHARE."

10. UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARD SOUTH AFRICA: SOBUKWE

LAMENTED THE FACT THAT THE AMERICAN IMAGE IN AFRICA HAD SUFFERED IN RECENT YEARS. DURING THE 1960S, HE NOTED, AFRICANS LOOKED ON THE UNITED STATES AS A VERY SYMPATHETIC FRIEND. THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND THE KENNEDY AND JOMSON RESPONSE, PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO THE POLICY STATEMENTS MADE AND LEGISLATION PASSED, CREATED A FUND OF GOOD-WILL FOR THE UNITED STATES IN AFRICA. THIS HAS CHANGED. AMONG BLACKS IN SOUTH AFRICA THERE IS THE IMPRESSION THAT THE USG GIVES COMFORT TO THE SAG. AFTER I HAD EXPLAINED THE EVOLUTION OF OUR POLICY THE PAST DECADE AND HALF, EMPHASIZING THE RESTRICTIONS WHICH CONTINUE TO APPLY, SOBUKWE OBSERVED THAT THE SLIPPAGE WAS PROBABLY DUE MORE TO STYLE THAN SUBSTANCE BUT NEVERTHELESS THE IMPRESSION PERSISTS THAT THE US IS SUPPORTIVE OF THE SAG.

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SKILLFUL PROPAGANDA BY THE SAG HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THIS. HE MENTIONED HOW THE SAG HAS PLAYED UP EXPANDED US INVESTMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA AS A VOTE OF CONFIDENCE AND BY STRESSING HOW SOUTH AFRICA STANDS WITH THE WEST IN RESISTING COMMUNIST EXPANSION HAS GIVEN THE IMPRESSION THAT THE USG SHARES ITS VIEWS IN THIS AREA.

11. WHEN ASKED TO COMMENT ON PRESENT UNITED STATES POLICY FROM A BLACK PERSPECTIVE, SOBUKWE OFFERED THREE SUGGESTIONS:

A. REFURBISH YOUR IMAGE IN AFRICA. SOBUKWE SAID THAT THE US SHOULD RECAPTURE THE SYMPATHY IT ONCE ENGAGED. HE THOUGHT THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IS IN A POSITION TO DO THIS. IT SHOULD TAKE A STRONG STAND AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

B. REVIEW YOUR POLICY TOWARD PRIVATE INVESTMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA. HE DID NOT ADVOCATE WITHDRAWING INVESTMENT. THAT WOULD WORK A HARDSHIP. BUT THE USG MIGHT RESTRICT FURTHER FLOWS AND INSIST THAT US INVESTMENT IN COUNTRY DO A BETTER JOB OF PROVIDING EQUAL TREATMENT TO THEIR BLACK EMPLOYEES.

C. EXPAND YOUR EXCHANGE PROGRAMS. HE NOTED WITH MARKED ENTHUSIASM THAT VISITS UNDER THE IV PROGRAM HAD "RADICALIZED" PEOPLE SUCH AS SONNY LEON AND PERCY QOBOZA AND MADE THEM MUCH MORE MILITANT AND DETERMINED LEADERS. HE ADVOCATED THE EXCHANGE OF STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS BOTH WAYS WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THOSE WHO HAD FLED THE COUNTRY.

12. COMMENT: AS A BANNED PERSON SOBUKWE IS EFFECTIVELY REMOVED FROM ANY ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLE IN SOUTH AFRICA. WHAT CONTACTS HE MAINTAINS WITH THE PAC AND OTHER BLACK

GROUPS IS HAJD TO TELL.I FIND HIM A MORE PROFOUND AND
ANALYTICAL MAN THAN GATSHA BUTHELEZI. WHETHER HE WOULD BE
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AS CHARISMATIC ON THE HUSTINGS I AM NOT SURE. PERHAPS NOT.
NEVERTHELESS, HIS QUALITIES AS A LEADER ARE EASILY DISCERNIBLE.
THIS COMBINED WITH THE MARTYR IMAGE OF HIS LONG IMPRISONMENT
ON ROBBEN ISLAND WOULD MAKE HIM A POWERFUL POLITICAL FIGURE
IF HE WERE ALLOWED TO MOVE FREELY. UNDOUBTEDLY, THIS IS
WHY THE SAG KEEPS HIM UNDER WRAPS THROUGH BANNING AND
SURVEILLANCE OF HIS MOVEMENTS.

13. POSTSCRIPT. UNDER TERMS OF HIS BANNING, SOBUKWE
MAY NOT BE QUOTED. HE SPECIFICALLY ASKED THAT NO RPT
NO PUBLIC REFERENCE BE MADE TO THE VIEWS EXPRESSED TO
ME. READERS OF THIS MESSAGE ARE ASKED TO HONOR THE
REQUEST AS THE CONSEQUENCE OF DISCLOSURE COULD BE
UNFORTUNATE FOR SOBUKWE AND RESULT IN LOSS OF THIS
MISSION'S ACCESS TO HIM.

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